



WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE
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Testimony In Support of Assembly Bill 647
Assembly Committee on Jobs, Economy and Small Business
March 8, 2012

Chairperson Williams and members of the Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 647, which would create a business ombudsman position within the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. I want to thank Representative Loudenberg for tackling this important issue with me.

As we have heard over and over in this committee, and as Representative Loudenberg just alluded to in her testimony, navigating the maze of state agencies and regulations is an all-too-frequent source of frustration for businesspeople here in Wisconsin. Too frequently they encounter unnecessary challenges, whether it be receiving conflicting answers from different sources, inadvertently overlooking a necessary application or permit, or failing to hear back from an agency with a timely application or permit decision. Now, I believe these agencies – imperfect though they may be at times – play an important role in the lives of Wisconsinites. But I sought to find a direct, hands-on way that we in the Legislature could assist businesspeople facing these challenges. By creating a business ombudsman position within the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), I believe that Assembly Bill 647 would do just that.

The idea behind AB 647 is a straightforward one: create a position within WEDC that is dedicated to assisting businesspeople in working with state agencies. For example, if a person wants to expand their business and they apply to various state agencies in order to obtain the proper approval and documentation, they could meet ahead of time with the ombudsman to get an idea of their required compliance needs and avoid any surprises down the road. Another example, more of a “worst-case scenario” example, is if a businessperson was getting the “run around” from an agency, they could request the ombudsman’s advocacy to encourage the slow-moving agency to make a final decision.

What AB 647 boils down to is ensuring that there is a state office dedicated to helping businesspeople that are starting, maintaining, or expanding a business as they wade through the law and agency regulations. I think this is a laudable goal and an important step to take. I urge the Committee to support this legislation. I am happy to take any questions that the Committee may have on this bill.

Thank you.

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Rep. Amy Loudenbeck

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Thank you madam chair for holding a hearing on AB 647 and thank you to the committee members for the opportunity to testify before you today on this important bill to create a business ombudsman position established and operated by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

The primary goal of this new office is to improve the conditions for conducting business in the state. There is presently no single entity or function in Wisconsin dedicated to helping businesses understand the roles of various state agencies.

I spent over 15 working in the environmental engineering and consulting field. Over the years I became involved in many aspects of regulatory compliance, including zoning, licensing, health and safety, building permits, sign permits, and landscape permits. This was in addition to the traditional areas of environmental compliance including various air permits, stormwater permits, solid and liquid waste permits, and wastewater discharge permits.

All too often, I would be meeting with a company after they realized that they had started work on a project that would require various permits or licenses. This was very frustrating for my clients, not to mention costly and time consuming. This type of experience is all too common, and often leads to animosity and the general feeling that government regulations are too complicated, that there are too many layers of oversight, and that agencies are working against the business community.

I would expect that many of you have heard stories of aggravation from your constituents. These unfortunate experiences are a strain on the engine of economic growth in our state.

I am sympathetic to these concerns and I hope that you are too. I'd like to see state government act as a resource, instead of a roadblock, to help businesses navigate the complex regulatory process.

Early consultation with a "business ombudsman" as prescribed under the bill will help businesses allocate adequate resources to the compliance needs of their project or idea, and help avoid expensive surprises, costly delays, or an unintended violation or non-compliance issue.

I believe this business liaison position is critical to improving the business climate in this state, particularly related to small business start-up and expansion. I urge the committee's support of Assembly Bill 647.

Thank you.